

REVIEW OF:

Shiraz Durrani (2008): Information & Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship. Library Juice Press, 345 pp., \$ 45.00, ISBN-13: 9780980200409

by Anne Mostad-Jensen

Information & Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship is a collection of essays, interviews and book reviews from the 30+ year career of Shiraz Durrani. Durrani spent the early part of his career at the University of Nairobi Library, until his political writings forced him into exile in Great Britain in September of 1984.

The collection is divided into four sections including: Society and Information: A South Perspective, The Battle Continues in Colder Climate, Taking a Stand, and Book Reviews.

The first section *Society and Information: A South Perspective* includes Durrani's writings on libraries, librarianship, politics and the history of Kenya. Durrani tells one story of a university librarian visiting his hometown, where the majority of the populace was coffee farmers. The university library he worked at had a world-renown collection of resources on coffee. Farmers asked him a question: What information did his library have that could explain why they, hardworking coffee farmers, toiled all day to produce a coffee crop that they knew sold for thousands of pounds in Great Britain, yet many were unable to afford to buy their own coffee because they were paid so little for their crop? The librarian had no answer. While his library had information about almost any other aspect of coffee the information held in his library could not answer the social and political question asked by the community members of his hometown. This story really sets the tone of the entire collection of writings of Durrani as he explores the social, political and economic influences surrounding the creation and provision of information services (or lack of), particularly in relation to his experiences in Kenya and Great Britain.

The *Society and Information* section is further divided into two subsections. In the first, titled *Rocking the Boat*, are nine essays that describe the lingering effects of colonialism and neocolonialism had and has on the structure of libraries and library service in Kenya. *Politics of Information, Information for Politics* – the second section - describes the creation of underground and alternative literature during and following the Mau Mau movement.

The Battle Continues in Colder Climates is a collection of essays written following Durrani's exile in Great Britain. This section is also divided into subsections. In the first essay, *Taking a Stand*, Durrani talks about social and political context and action. He calls for active involvement within librarianship. Durrani discusses the active role libraries play in education, both in improving learning through practices such as reflective learning and creating a flexible environment where you can change course content to meet the changing needs of the LIS field. The subsequent collection of essays talks about the successes Durrani has had in turning ideas into action. The three highlighted are the *Three Continents Liberation* collection, the *Black and Minority Ethnic Stock Group in Hackney Libraries*, and the *Quality Leaders Project – Youth*.

Book Reviews is a collection of six book reviews written by Durrani, which reflect back on topic areas he has focused on during his career. Following the *Book Reviews* section Durrani ties together the collection under a piece called *Organise, Do Not Agonise*, which is a saying from the Pan African Movement. In it Durrani asks what, if any positive achievements have been made towards a socially-relevant public library model, as he decries the move towards privatization, the lack of access to information services, the lack of the focus on the social and community sides of libraries. Durrani calls librarians to action by urging librarians, as Mau Mau activists urged the people of Kenya, to "never be silent."

Durrani is an excellent storyteller. The book is worth reading for the historical accounts of the Mau Mau and the political history of Kenya. The only major weakness of the book is some repetition in the essays as he wrote on some topics in multiple publications or formats. Overall, the book is a great read for those who are interested in a wide range of issues in librarianship from progressive librarianship to information politics, library services to multicultural communities, minorities in librarianship to librarianship in third world countries and to those who are interested in the history of Kenya.